

**3/11/22 Friday**

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Pentagon Official Calls Ukraine 'Case Study' for Taiwan, Says Should be 'As Prickly as Possible'

According to a November 2021 count by Sputnik, in the four years Donald Trump was a US president, from 2017 to 2021, Washington sold Taipei some \$18.3 billion in weapons, ranging from torpedoes and cruise missiles to advanced F-16V "Viper" fighter jets.

A senior Pentagon official heading US President Joe Biden's National Defense Strategy planning has told US lawmakers that future plans for defending Taiwan should include lessons drawn from Ukrainian resistance to Russia's special military operation, including an emphasis on guerrilla tactics.

"I think the situation we're seeing in Ukraine right now is a very worthwhile case study for them about why Taiwan needs to do all it can to build asymmetric capabilities, to get its population ready, so that it can be as prickly as possible should China choose to violate its sovereignty," Mara Karlin, assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans and capabilities, [told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee](#) on Thursday.

Typically speaking, asymmetric warfare, or irregular warfare, refers to insurgent or guerrilla tactics, by which a smaller, scattered and more mobile force defends territory against a larger invading force. In the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act ([NDAA](#)), [the massive law](#) passed in December 2021 that funds the Pentagon budget, Congress defined "defensive asymmetric capabilities" as "the capabilities necessary to defend Taiwan against conventional external threats, including coastal defense missiles, naval mines, anti-aircraft capabilities, cyber defenses, and special operations forces."

Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington, DC, [told Reuters](#) that Karlin's proposal "would not only push Taiwan into a precarious situation, but also bring unbearable consequences for the US side."

While the US has long supplied the government in Taiwan with weapons of war, the pace of armament sales rapidly accelerated after 2017. Between 2017 and 2021, the US sold Taiwan \$18.3 billion in weaponry - a [trend Biden has continued](#) since taking office in January 2021. In November 2021, a group of Republican senators proposed a "Taiwan Deterrence Act" to create a \$2 billion-per-year funnel of weapons into the small island nation off the east coast of Asia. The government of Taiwan formally calls itself the Republic of China, and is all that remains of the republican government that ruled all of China from the abdication of the last Chinese emperor in 1912 until the communist victory in the civil war in 1949. While the Communist Party of China set up the People's Republic of China on the mainland, it was unable at the time to invade Taiwan. Both governments claim to be the sole legitimate government of all of China. While Washington has pledged its support for Taipei in defending its autonomy from Beijing, its relationship with the island nation remains informal because [Washington diplomatically accepted Beijing's position](#) that Taiwan is a Chinese province in rebellion, as a condition of

normalizing relations in 1979. US support, including visits by politicians and military personnel, are strongly opposed by Beijing, which protests what it consistently characterizes as interference in its internal affairs.

After the Kremlin launched its special military operation in Ukraine in late February, US [officials raised fears](#) that a Chinese move against Taiwan could be next. There have been no reports of preparations for such an operation by Beijing, however. If it did happen there are doubts that the US could stop Beijing from asserting sovereignty over the island - or if the US would make the attempt.

Earlier this week, Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councilor [Wang Yi said to reporters](#) during a meeting of the National People's Congress that the situations in Ukraine and Taiwan were totally different.

"The most fundamental difference is Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and the Taiwan question completely belongs to China's domestic affairs, while the Ukraine issue is a dispute between Russia and Ukraine," Wang said.

"The scheme to use Taiwan to contain China is doomed to fail and Taiwan will eventually return to the embrace of the motherland," he asserted.

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#### Congress Sends Federal Anti-Lynching Bill to Biden After 122-Year-Long Fight

Since the first anti-lynching bill was introduced in 1900, over 200 attempts have been made to pass a federal law designating the extrajudicial killing of Black Americans as a hate crime. The law was long opposed by Southern lawmakers, whose base of power was white supremacist Southerners who supported racial segregation.

On Monday, the US Senate unanimously voted to pass the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, named after a 14-year-old Black boy who in 1955 was [tortured and murdered](#) in Mississippi by a group of white men. Till's brutal murder shocked the world and helped spark a mass movement that a decade later forced an end to formal racial apartheid in the United States informally known as the "Jim Crow" system.

A week earlier, the House passed it by [a vote of 422-3](#); the three lawmakers who voted against it were Republican representatives Andrew Clyde (R-GA), Thomas Massie (R-KY), and Chip Roy (R-TX).

Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL), a Black veteran of that bitter fight and the sponsor of the bill, [said in a statement](#) that lynching is "a long-standing and uniquely American weapon of racial terror that has for decades been used to maintain the white hierarchy."

"Perpetrators of lynching got away with murder time and time again - in most cases, they were never even brought to trial. [...] Today, we correct this historic and abhorrent injustice," he said. "Lynchings was America's first form of domestic terrorism," Dan Duster, the great-grandson of famed Black journalist Ida B. Wells, [told ABC7 Chicago](#). Wells used her reporting to cast a spotlight on the often-ignored lynchings of Black Americans in the early 20th century.

Between 1882 and 1968, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) recorded 4,743 lynchings in the United States. The group notes that [other sources have reached](#) different totals, due to the difficulty in tracking and verifying the killings. Many historians believe the reported tallies to be well below the true number of murders.

The vast majority of the killings happened in the American South, where white aristocrats staged an armed rebellion in the 1860s in defense of the legal enslavement of Black Americans, whose labor formed the basis of the cotton-export economy. After the rebellious Confederacy of states was defeated in 1865 and Congress banned private slavery, a brief attempt by radical Republicans to eradicate the legacy of inequality between Black and white Americans was curbed by a resurgent white supremacist movement, which reestablished an apartheid system that persisted until 1965.

The NAACP's count includes 3,446 Black victims and 1,297 white victims, who [became the targets](#) of white supremacists as a result of helping Black people or for taking a public stance against lynching and the Jim Crow system. Not counted in the tally are numerous other lynching victims across the country, including immigrants from Mexico and China, Native Americans, and LGBTQ people.

The first attempt to ban lynching was in 1900 in a bill introduced by [Rep. George Henry White](#) (R-NC), the last of more than a dozen Black congressmen who took office during the Reconstruction era. When he left office in 1901, there wasn't a single sitting Black congressman until 1929. The bill was killed by the Judiciary Committee, despite [a huge petition](#) delivered by White that called for outlawing lynching and creating a "Central Detective Bureau" to record and investigate information in support of lynching prosecutions.

Another notable attempt came in 1918, when Missouri Republican Rep. Leonidas Dyer [introduced a bill](#) that was passed by the House but stalled in the Senate thanks to the filibuster rule, which conservatives successfully deployed for decades to block progressive legislation. [Recent stonewalling](#) of Biden's political agenda by Republican senators has aroused calls to repeal the filibuster rule.

Between 1918 and 2022, more than 200 attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation were made, according to a count by the [Associated Press](#).

The Emmett Till Antilynching Act, the purported final iteration of an anti-lynching bill, was first introduced in 2018. During the [2020 George Floyd protests](#), when millions of Americans poured into the streets to demand an end to anti-Black police violence and killings, as well as lynchings by vigilantes, progress on the bill was [stalled by Sen. Rand Paul](#) (R-KY), who claimed it was "overly broad," demanding an amendment be added to ensure it "would apply the criminal penalties for lynching only and not for other crimes." The version passed this week contains Paul's proposed changes, and the Republican Kentucky senator voted in favor of its passage.

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Israel Records First Polio Case in 33 Years, Doctors Fear 'Outbreak' After Jerusalem Sewage Tests

Israeli doctors have confirmed the first clinical case of polio in the country in more than 30 years, and now fear more cases may not yet have been detected after testing Jerusalem's sewage system.

A four-year-old girl in Jerusalem was [confirmed diagnosed](#) with Poliomyelitis on Sunday, the Israel Ministry of Health announced. The girl had not been vaccinated against the contagious virus, which is most commonly spread between humans by fecal matter, although in certain circumstances the live virus contained in the vaccine can also cause infections.

While the disease was common in the early and mid-20th century, aggressive vaccination campaigns dramatically reduced global cases, and several parts of the globe have since been declared polio-free. According to the [World Health Organization](#), in 1988 - the last year polio was detected in Israel - there were 350,000 polio cases worldwide. By 2017, just 22 new cases were detected globally.

There is no cure for polio, but the vaccine can prevent infection. Most people who contract the virus suffer no symptoms, while about 25% suffer fever and sore throat. A much smaller amount develop pains, while just 0.5% suffer the debilitating muscle weakness and paralysis for which the disease is most notorious.

The Israeli child diagnosed on Sunday had already suffered muscle weakness and was released from the Hadassah Medical Center to get support in a specialist hospital.

In addition, the Health Ministry reported two additional preliminary positive cases that have not yet been confirmed. One was from a contact of the girl's, and another was in an unrelated stool sample sent to the lab, according to the [Times of Israel](#).

In addition, the Health Ministry said it had detected polio in the capital city's sewage system, suggesting an even greater spread of the dangerous virus.

Hebrew University epidemiologist Prof. Hagai Levine told the paper the cases could be "the tip of the iceberg," noting that "when you find one case of polio, you actually have dozens or hundreds."

Another polio case was found in Lilongwe, Malawi, in February, [according to the WHO](#). It was the first wild case in Africa in over five years, and health officials claimed it was imported from Pakistan, where the disease is still found. A few days later, [Malawi declared an outbreak](#) and set up testing sites, although no additional cases have been announced.

"As long as wild polio exists anywhere in the world all countries remain at risk of importation of the virus," Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa, said in a statement.

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Texas Judge Temporarily Blocks State Effort to Investigate Parents of Transgender Children  
[Yesterday](#) (Updated: Yesterday)

A Texas judge has ordered an immediate halt to the state's investigation of parents who support their transgender children, which began recently after Republican Governor Greg Abbott decreed the practice to be child abuse.

In a Friday ruling, Travis County District Court Judge Amy Clark Meachum issued a statewide temporary injunction halting investigations by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) via its Child Protective Services (CPS).

"The state is enjoined from prosecuting parents and providers for providing gender affirming care as well as placing parents on registry," Meachum ordered.

On February 22, [Abbott ordered DFPS](#) to begin investigating parents of transgender children who [support their child's trans identity](#), as well as the medical facilities that provide support for trans children. He cited as justification a legal opinion by State Attorney General Ken Paxton several days earlier, finding that "a number of so-called 'sex change' procedures constitute child abuse under existing Texas law."

In practical terms, what the order would mean is that the state of Texas would remove trans children from their families and place them with new families or in foster homes, neither of which would support them expressing their trans identities. The situation has [caused numerous families](#) to flee the state or seek out legal counsel to challenge the state probes.

However, Meachum sided with a challenge to Abbott's order by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), finding that it "was given the effect of a new law or new agency rule despite no regulative action. It violates separation of powers."

Texas is just one of several states that have [attempted to ban trans youth](#) from accessing gender-affirming care, part of a massive nationwide effort by members of the Republican Party to roll back LGBTQ rights at the state level. However, Abbott's order is by far the harshest iteration.

In response, many experts and activists have [accused the state](#) of genocide against trans people, pointing to the [United Nations' definition](#) of genocide, which includes causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a group; deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and forcibly transferring children of a group to another group.

GOP politicians say they are acting to protect children from "pushy" doctors and parents they claim are forcing "gender ideology" on unassuming children. All gender-affirming, hormone therapy, and transition-related services are purely voluntary. Further, all major medical associations [oppose such bans](#), and numerous [studies have shown](#) that access to gender-affirming care translates into better health outcomes for trans patients - and that denial of affirming care correlates with [sharp spikes in attempted suicide](#).

Earlier this week, the GOP-controlled Florida government passed a bill banning discussion of LGBTQ topics in schools, which has been nicknamed the ["Don't Say Gay" bill](#). In response to widespread criticism of the measure, Christina Pushaw, Governor Ron DeSantis' spokesperson, [accused opponents](#) of being "groomers" - a term for pedophiles who lure children into trusting them so they can take sexual advantage of a child.

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## US Judge Rejects Trump's 'Bad Faith' Countersuit in Prolonged E. Jean Carroll Defamation Saga

By - Evan Craighead

In December 2020, US District Judge Lewis Kaplan issued an order denying US President Donald Trump's request to substitute the US Department of Justice as the defendant in a defamation lawsuit filed by E. Jean Carroll, who, in 2019, accused Trump of sexually assaulting her in a department store dressing room in the mid-1990s.

Former US President Donald Trump's attempt to invoke New York's anti-SLAPP law has been denied by US District Judge Lewis Kaplan, according to a 23-page decision in which the latter ripped the former and his legal team for "bad faith" litigation and dilatory tactics.

Anti-SLAPP laws are intended to counter 'strategic lawsuits against public participation,' which have become a common tool for those seeking to use the court system or expensive legal proceedings to silence or intimidate criticism from individuals exercising free speech.

"In the court's view, characterization of defendant's previous and threatened future actions as dilatory, in bad faith or unduly prejudicial would be a bootless exercise," Kaplan wrote. "They are, in varying degrees, all three."

The judge highlighted that Trump and his legal team, despite their intent, "have delayed the case to an extent that readily could have been far less."

"Plaintiff's only claim in this case is a single count of defamation," the US District Judge added. "It could have been tried and decided—one way or the other—long ago."

The prolonged legal saga began when E. Jean Carroll, a former columnist for Elle Magazine, released a book excerpt in June 2019, in which she accused Trump of raping her in a dressing room at Bergdorf Goodman, a department store in midtown Manhattan.

Trump at the time rejected Carroll's claims in [an interview with The Hill](#), by suggesting that she was not his "type" and was lying in an attempt to stir up controversy and gain personal fame.

Trump's comments prompted Carroll to file her defamation lawsuit.

The former US president currently remains the defendant in the case, despite his in-office attempt to have the US Department of Justice intervene. Kaplan argued that even if Trump was in office at the time of the alleged mid-90s incident, his statements toward Carroll would be outside the scope of his employment.

Kaplan's most recent decision, dated Thursday and filed on Friday, comes weeks after he questioned Trump lawyer Alina Habba's request to invoke anti-SLAPP legislation enacted by New York in November 2020.

"I question whether you have the right to do what you are seeking to do, because it seems to me it's entirely inconsistent with the notion of futility," Kaplan noted, during a February hearing in the Manhattan borough of New York City.

Habba has since responded to Kaplan's Friday filing, vowing to continue fighting the lawsuit.

"While we are disappointed with the Court's decision today, we eagerly look forward to litigating this action and proving at trial that the plaintiff's claims have absolutely no basis in law or in fact," a Trump attorney told The Hill in an emailed statement.

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Hate Crime Hoax - Cartoon

By - Ted Rall

On Thursday, a Cook County Circuit Court sentenced US actor Jussie Smollett to 150 days behind bars and 30 months of probation for falsely reporting to authorities that he was the victim of a racist and homophobic attack in January 2019. Smollett, who is biracial and gay, had been found guilty of five counts of felony disorderly conduct.

Attorneys for Jussie Smollett, 39, plan to appeal the former "Empire" star's sentence, following claims that the court "made numerous trial errors leading up to the trial and during the pendency of the trial."

Smollett, who was immediately taken to jail after his Thursday sentencing, will remain behind bars during the appeal, per Cook County Circuit Judge James Linn.

The 39-year-old initially claimed that two men left a noose around his neck after a brutal assault involving chemicals and the hurling of homophobic and racist slurs. While it is now known that the alleged attack in Chicago's Streeterville neighborhood did not take place as described, [a representative for Smollett told CNN](#) that "everything is up in the air" regarding a possible return to TV and film.

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'Not My Idea of a President': Barr Says Trump 'Too Divisive' to Remain Unchallenged in Primary  
By - Evan Craighead

Amid a press run for his book, former US Attorney General Bill Barr appeared on CBS earlier this week and contended that while he would refuse to accept another cabinet position in former US President Donald Trump's administration, he would support the 75-year-old if he won the GOP nomination.

Former Trump-appointed US Attorney General Bill Barr revealed in an interview with CNN that he does not believe his former boss has what it takes to guarantee a "decisive" win for the GOP in the 2024 presidential election, and would welcome another Republican stepping up to the podium to challenge the one-term president in the primary season.

"Yes, I think the coming presidential election would be a good opportunity for the Republican Party because from my standpoint, the progressive left has—is sort of showing a sort of a totalitarian temperament," Barr told CNN's Jake Tapper in an interview broadcast Friday.

"I think the Republicans can win a decisive majority, but I don't think we can do it with Trump," added the Trump-appointed US attorney general. "He's just too divisive a candidate."

Barr noted that Trump is "not my idea of a president" and "went off the rails", refusing to listen to his advisers after losing the 2020 presidential election to then-Democratic nominee Joe Biden.

The former US attorney general said that although some voters support Trump's policies and admire his directness and perceived strength, his "pettiness" and "obnoxious behavior" are a turn-off for many Republicans.

"I felt he was going to lose the election because he was not controlling himself," Barr said of Trump's 2020 campaign. "He was allowing this pettiness to come through, and I feel it's one of his great failings."

While neither Trump or US President Joe Biden have formally announced a presidential campaign for 2024, that has not stopped pollsters from surveying American voters on a repeat matchup between the two political foes.

[According to a Wall Street Journal survey involving 1,500 registered voters](#), Biden and Trump would be neck-and-neck in a potential 2024 face-off, with each hypothetical nominee receiving 45% support.

The survey, conducted between March 2 and March 7, also showed that neither Biden or Trump were overly favored by voters, as 57% of respondents claimed they had an unfavorable view of Biden, and 55% disapproved of Trump. Overall, 15% of respondents held unfavorable views about both.

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Two Dead, Several Seriously Injured After Elderly Man Loses Control of SUV, DC Authorities Say

By - Evan Craighead

A preliminary investigation has found that a sports utility vehicle operated by an elderly man veered off the road and crashed into the outdoor dining section of the Parthenon Restaurant & Chevy Chase Lounge, located on the 5500 block of Connecticut Avenue NW in Washington, DC.

At least two women have died, and six others were hospitalized with injuries on Friday after emergency workers responded to a multi-victim crash involving a silver Subaru in northwest Washington, DC, at around 12:45 p.m., local time.

Three additional individuals, including the driver, were evaluated at the scene, but were not transported to area hospitals.

Initial reports detailed that eight people were taken to the hospital, including five said to be critically injured. Authorities have since confirmed that two of the eight hospitalized individuals have died.

The names of the deceased have yet to be released. The victims' ages range from 30 to 80 years old, DC authorities revealed during a news conference.

"All indications are this was truly accidental. There were no indications this was intentional," said Second District Cmdr. Duncan Bedlion, adding that the motorist remains cooperative and was alone in his vehicle.

Authorities with the MPD's crash investigation team are actively working to determine what caused the motorist to lose control, Bedlion noted.

The SUV, depicted in several images uploaded to social media, was observed to have DC plates.

"It sounded like a freight train came through here," a man who reportedly heard the incident told NBC Washington.

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Youtubers 'Saucy and Honey' Facing Seven Years Behind Bars After Hiding Out in Pennsylvania Target  
By - Evan Craighead

Followers of the "Saucy and Honey" channel on YouTube may be without content for a while after pranksters Charlotte Fischer and Johnson Larose took part in an alleged 24-hour hideout at a Target retail store in Exton, Pennsylvania.

It would appear authorities found nothing funny about a YouTube challenge uploaded by users "Saucy and Honey", as Fischer, 24, and Larose, 25, were arrested earlier this month in connection with the after-hours incident and are now facing up to seven years in jail for third-degree criminal trespassing and conspiracy.

"It became a little bit bigger of an investigation, trying to find out what they were doing, was there something criminal?", West Whiteland Township Police Detective Scott Pezick told FOX29.

To make matters worse, the pair's uploaded video appears to be manipulated to make it appear that they stayed in the store the entire night. However, responding authorities did not immediately catch the two trespassers, as they apparently exited the Target around 3:00 a.m., local time.

Authorities noted that the situation could have ended much differently for the two.

"When you go to burglary call you have a heightened sense of awareness. Suddenly, you see somebody in there or maybe they get spooked and run, our officers are well-trained, but it's not a great situation for anybody", Detective Pezick told FOX29. "They weren't out to harm anybody, but we want to make sure this doesn't happen again".

Fischer, who, along with Larose, has been released on \$25,000 unsecured bail, told FOX29 that she has "no regrets", although the potential punishment is higher than she expected.

"I mean, no regrets just living life and having fun, it's kind of sad that all of this came out of it, we were expecting a fine nothing crazy", she said.

The pair has been banned from all Target stores in Pennsylvania, and are due in court on 24 March.

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## 'Puts Us On the Map': Texas Rattlesnake Festival Remains Despite Backlash From Animal Rights Groups

By - Mary Manley

Sweetwater's bloody rattlesnake roundup is a decades-old tradition that some Texans are unlikely to abandon. But with other rattlesnake roundups in the United States turning away from decapitating, skinning, and butchering the animals, to leave the innocent reptiles untouched for humane educational purposes, why can't Texas?

What is advertised as the "World's Largest Rattlesnake Roundup" draws about 25,000 visitors annually to the town of Sweetwater, a community in Texas made up of a little over 10,000 people. For Sweetwater, the festival brings in a reported \$8.3 [million](#) for the town. That's a price tag that's hard to ignore, even if it means death to thousands of animals.

"This does put us on the map. What it does for our community is give us a sense of place," said Kareen Hunt, director of the Sweetwater and Nolan county Chamber of Commerce. [Hunt](#) says she gets calls from tourists in Europe who wish to attend the murderous event.

But the festival's dark underbelly has drawn criticism from animal rights groups and many others who see the treatment of the animals as cruel and inhumane. Every March, tens of thousands of snakes are driven out of their dens in the wild through the use of gasoline being poured into the ground, making the burrow uninhabitable. From that point, any wildlife which isn't being hunted, enjoys the pollution of the surrounding land and water which affects over [350](#) wildlife [species](#).

Among the critics of the Texas festival is the nonprofit Advocates for Snake Preservation (ASP), which calls for the conservation and education of snakes. "Negative attitudes about snakes may be the biggest barrier to their conservation – it is difficult to gain public support when you aren't perceived as cute and cuddly," the group [writes](#).

The group has condemned rattlesnake roundups as unjustified and lacking critical science to back up any false claims made about population [control](#).

"Roundups promote overexploitation of natural populations of wildlife, unnecessary killing and inhumane treatment of individual animals, degradation of habitat, and promotion of outdated attitudes toward important elements of America's natural heritage. Found nowhere but in the Americas, and especially diverse in the United States, the more than thirty species of rattlesnakes comprise a distinctive component of North America's biodiversity, and one that is increasingly imperiled," condemned the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH), a group which is dedicated to the study of fish, amphibians, and [reptiles](#).

Proponents of the event, held annually since 1958, claim that killing snakes helps with population density, and that their venom is harvested for anti-venom treatments. But activists note that the snake population is already maintained by natural predators, prey abundance, and [disease](#). Taking the animals out of the local ecosystem can result in an explosion of the rat and rodent [populations](#), which carry many [diseases](#).

Additionally, venom used in the production of anti-venom is already collected from captive colonies of rattlesnakes by companies like BTG International, which is responsible for making CroFab, the only FDA-approved anti-venom [available](#), and Red Rock Biologics, which manufactures a vaccine for dogs and horses.

Rattlesnake killing roundups are not approved by the FDA, and subsequently any venom collected at these events cannot be used in the production of any FDA-approved anti-venom treatment.

The Sweetwater annual roundup is reportedly a bloodbath. Prior to the event, snakes are loaded into crowded and confined spaces where they are heard rattling. Western diamondbacks are taken and shot in the head with a bolt gun, before being decapitated, skinned and gutted. As snake brain tissue does not succumb to the cessation of blood supply and oxygen - like other creatures - the reptiles remain fully conscious throughout the killings.

Once skinned, their bodies, regularly continue to writhe, removed [hearts](#) continue beating, and decapitated heads continue to gasp for air.

"We've had it beat for up to an hour," gushed one event-goer at a Sweetwater roundup in [2017](#), in response to watching a dismembered snake heart resting on a butchering table.

Festival goers press bloody handprints on walls of the facility, signing a handprint with their name. Children are encouraged to hold bloody and decapitated bodies.

The state of Georgia replaced its own rattlesnake roundup with a festival deemed cruelty-free by wildlife experts. The Whigham Rattlesnake Roundup held its first humane event earlier this month, choosing to educate the public about the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, which has lost 97% of its natural [ecosystem](#), and is not protected by the states in which it lives, including South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama or Louisiana.

"We're delighted that Whigham's event now celebrates these awe-inspiring snakes and recognizes the importance of respecting and protecting them," [said](#) Elise Bennett, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

"Whigham's new vision emphasizes how cruel and antiquated the few remaining roundups are, including the largest one left, in Sweetwater, Texas. It also shows that it's possible to have a change of heart and make compassionate changes for these really misunderstood animals," noted Bennett.

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Perfect Timing: Live Report on One of Los Angeles' 'Most Dangerous' Streets Captures Crash  
By - Mary Manley

A reporter for KTLA was covering a story about a fatal hit-and-run on one of the most dangerous roads in Los Angeles when a car accident occurred on the scene at that exact moment, interrupting his on-air coverage.

"Officials say it's one of the most dangerous streets in all of Los Angeles, and now-" said Gene [Kang](#), suddenly cut off mid-sentence by a car crash on the road directly behind him.

A blaring horn can be heard before a sedan slams into another sedan's driver side door before pulling a U-turn, running over a curb and speeding away from the scene.

"Our security guard Walter Mann yelled 'get back' and we moved as the car came racing towards us. It veered away at the last second and T-boned the car," Kang [said](#).

The notorious location is in south Los Angeles, at the intersection of 84th and Hoover streets.

Officers who responded to the scene said that the person who drove off was most likely involved in a previous [crime](#) and was avoiding getting caught. The attempt to evade penalties will most likely be short lived, as officers were able to recover a license plate that fell during the crash. Kang was covering a hit-and-run collision that had killed a [father](#) Jemmy Chavarria, who had been crossing the street with his family on February 26. The February incident took place after a driver grew frustrated with the build-up of traffic as the family crossed and chose to drive onto the opposite lane and speed through the crosswalk area - despite the road's crossing guard and flashing traffic lights.

While Chavarria had managed to save his wife and 2 year-old son before he was hit by the car, he later died at a [hospital](#). The family had been on their way to church.

The driver who killed the 42-year-old father has yet to be arrested, but a reward of up to \$50,000 will be given to anyone who can provide information on the driver's identification or arrest.

"Today I'm asking you, if you saw the car or you know the person who killed my husband, please contact the police," begged the father's widow, Angelica [Chavarria](#). The woman stated that she can forgive the driver, but stated that "you have to pay for what you did."

"It hurts so much. I miss him so much," she [wept](#). "My 2-year-old asks for his daddy, and I don't know what to say to him. You took his daddy away from him."

At a news conference following the death, Los Angeles Police Detective Ryan [Moreno](#) described the father's last moments as an "amazing act of heroism."

Los Angeles City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson told [reporters](#) that Hoover is one of the most dangerous thoroughfares in the city and is included in the High-Injury [Network](#), which covers 6% of city streets responsible for 70% of pedestrian deaths and injuries.

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'Significant Gaps' Preventing US Homeland Security's Ability to Detect Domestic Terrorism - Report

By - Mary Manley

In the days following the deadly 6 January 2021 attack on Capitol Hill, leaders of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created an independent commission to investigate the events. That panel was modelled after a commission made to investigate 9/11, and has brought to light the DHS' apparent lack of concern toward domestic terrorism.

Alejandro Mayorkas says the department has "significant gaps" in their attitude towards domestic terrorism. Mayorkas was sworn in as secretary of DHS by US President Joe Biden barely a month after the attack on Capitol [Hill](#).

Although the DHS was created to protect "the American people from terrorist [threats](#)", the department failed to establish guidelines for what [constitutes](#) "domestic terrorism/extremism", as well as how to identify and report an occurrence.

The DHS "did not track domestic violent extremism allegations as their own sub-category of misconduct. Instead, such allegations were classified under another sub-category", the internal

investigation [found](#). The department's database shows that the first time the department addressed "domestic" violent extremism wasn't until April 2021, when Mayorkas [announced](#) a plan to conduct an internal review to address the threat of domestic extremism within the department.

"The Working Group assessed that the department has significant gaps that have impeded its ability to comprehensively prevent, detect, and respond to potential threats related to domestic violent extremism within DHS", the investigative panel [announced](#). "These gaps, which the department is working with urgency to close, may have impacted DHS officials' ability to adequately identify and address related threats", the panel added.

Officials within DHS were well aware of the planned attack on Capitol Hill, weeks before the event, and chose to keep that information to themselves. A 50-page [report](#) released by the DHS Office of Inspector General on Tuesday details the division within the department's intelligence office, and their failure to disclose information leading up to the 6 January attack.

"In the weeks before the events at the U.S. Capitol, I&A identified specific open source threat information related to January 6 but did not issue any intelligence products about these threats until January 8", the [report](#) reads. "Additionally, the Counterterrorism Mission Center (CTMC) identified indicators that the January 6 events might turn violent but did not issue an intelligence product outside I&A, even though it had done so for other events".

On 21 December 2020, officials in the department's intelligence office circulated information among themselves regarding information relating to an individual who had plans to kill protesters by the dozens, calls to bring weapons to DC, threats of violence against Democrats, law enforcement, and the targeting of specific [politicians](#).

Correspondence between two DHS members shows their awareness of threats leading up to the 6 January [attack](#), with one employee texting on 2 January at 8:21 p.m., "Also I found a map of all the exits and entrances to the capitol building. I feel like people are actually going to try and hurt politicians. Jan 6th is gonna be crazy, not to mention the inauguration. Watch us get surged for that lol", the message read.

The second employee responded to this message, writing at 8:22 p.m., "Have a feeling as well... days leading up to as well. Some things were going on downtown apparently last night as well. Couple of shoving people around and Proud Boys in the area".

Then, at 11:17 p.m., the first employee writes, "Like there's these people talking about hanging Democrats from ropes like wtf". The second employee responds with, "They'd need alot of rope, I think DC is pretty much all democrat haha".

According to the Inspector General's report, neither of these employees believed this information warranted an Open Source Infrastructure Report (OSIR). The employees said they were unsure of what language was serious enough to warrant a report, which has been subsequently blamed on a lack of formal [training](#).

"As of January 6, 2021, 16 out of 21 collectors had less than 1 year of experience, and some of these new collectors said they did not receive adequate training to help determine when threat information should be reported", the [report](#) stated.

The DHS employees also [blamed](#) their inaction on events of the previous summer, when DHS received heavy criticism for deploying Border Patrol tactical teams to deal with protesters in Portland, [Oregon](#), where protesters were demonstrating in response to the murder of George

Floyd. Collectors say they failed to file any reports because they were "affected by the scrutiny they received" that summer.

Despite the DHS' apparent mishandling of the 6 January attack, the Office of Inspector General's recommendations appear to be relatively mild in addressing the department's failures. Those recommendations include "enhanced annual training" and reviewing guidelines, as well as implementing policies and procedures on "the timely [issuance](#) of warning analysis, both strategic and tactical, about threats or upcoming events across I&A's mission areas".

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RPT - Russian Church in Germany Helps Stuck Truckers, Refugees From Ukraine - Metropolitan

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Clergy and faithful of the Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR) in Germany provide food, medicine and other support to refugees from Ukraine and Russian truckers stuck in the country due to the recent sanctions, Metropolitan of Berlin and Germany Mark told Sputnik.

"About 1,000 Russian truckers are being stuck now in Germany. These people were on the way when the current crisis in Ukraine began, so they do not know how to leave Germany now. They have no money, their phones are blocked," Metropolitan Mark said.

Many Russian believers and Germans are driving now on highways trying to find those truckers and provide them some help, he added. He also did not rule out that some of these truckers remain unaccounted because they could be stuck in very different places.

Metropolitan pointed out that the church began supporting refugees who are coming to Germany from Ukraine.

"Three ROCOR bishops and one Moscow Patriarchate bishop in Europe issued a proclamation asking clergy and flock to help. Someone can provide people housing, others may give them food, medicines or different support," he added.

As most of the refugees do not speak German and even English, young Russian parishioners are visiting local hospitals and helping them to communicate with physicians, which is sometimes needed urgently, Arndt noted.

"We have many areas where our people can help," he emphasized. "Unfortunately I have no specific information, because it changes even not every day, but each minute."

Speaking of refugees who flee from Ukraine to Russia, Metropolitan Mark noted that they receive support mostly from ROCOR's parishes in America.

"I heard that they receive assistance more from America rather than from Europe," he said. European dioceses also send humanitarian aid to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the leadership of Metropolitan Onufrii.

"We provide them food, clothes, blankets and other things," metropolitan Mark said.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk for protection against attacks by Ukrainian troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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RPT - Ban on Russian Alcohol to Make Americans Pay More for Inferior Alternatives - Distributors

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's ban on alcohol beverage imports from Russia will not significantly affect businesses in the United States, but consumers will have to pay for expensive and lower-quality alternatives, restaurant owners and distributors of Russian-made alcoholic beverages told Sputnik.

On Friday, President Joe Biden said the US is banning imports of alcohol, seafood and diamonds from Russia in the latest batch of sanctions for its special military operation in Ukraine.

"The ban on the sale of Russian-made vodka in the United States will in no way affect the 'Russian' or American businesses [stores and restaurants]. Customers will simply buy another brand of vodka," an owner of a Russian restaurant in the United States told Sputnik. "In this situation, American consumers will lose because Russian vodka has a really good taste and quality and, in most cases, cheaper than American and European ones."

While Biden was making an announcement about a new ban on Russian products, one of the biggest alcohol distributors in Washington, D.C. informed Sputnik that there is a cargo ship with Russian vodka on its way to the United States and it remains unclear whether it will be allowed to unload in any of the ports.

What can affect the alcohol market in the United States is the stoppage of supplies from Ukraine, according to founder of major alcohol importer Interbalt Fine Wine & Spirits, Konstantin Khizder.

Khizder believes the ban on Russian imports will not have any significant impact on the market in the United States but predicts a major gap in imports from Ukraine amid the ongoing military conflict there.

"Yes, until the war ends in Ukraine and Ukraine returns to a normal way of life. You know, the roads are bombed there. We have a plant in Odessa, we have a plant in Kharkiv, we have a plant in the Chernihiv region. This is a catastrophe," Khizder told Sputnik when asked whether the situation in Ukraine will impact deliveries of Ukrainian alcohol to the United States.

Khizder added that his company did not suffer any losses as a result of the boycott of Russian-made alcohol. Moreover, even after the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine, Interbalt proceeded with minor quantity deliveries of Russian beer and vodka to customers.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure

only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces said the Ukrainian troops were using typical terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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RPT - Vandalism Against Russian Churches in Europe Only Isolated Incidents - Metropolitan

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Most Europeans have begun to understand that the crisis in Ukraine was not created by the Russian people nor by the Russian Orthodox Church and they are not aggressors as portrayed by Western media, Metropolitan of Berlin and Germany Mark told Sputnik.

"I would say people are beginning to see the difference and not consider our church or all Russians as aggressors," Metropolitan Mark said.

At the same time, some Russian churches in Europe, North America and elsewhere have experienced acts of vandalism in recent days because of the events in Ukraine, the Metropolitan said.

"However, I have to say these are only isolated incidents," he added.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine in response to the request by the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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Trump Criticizes YouTube After Taking Down His Interview With NELK Boys

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump criticized YouTube for engaging in censorship after the social media giant took down his recent interview with the popular US podcast group known as the NELK Boys.

"Whatever happened to free speech in our country? Incredibly, but not surprisingly, the Big Tech lunatics have taken down my interview with the very popular NELK Boys so that nobody can watch it or in any way listen to it," Trump said in a statement on Friday. "Interestingly on the show I told them this would happen because Big Tech and the Fake News Media fear the truth, they fear criticism about [US President Joe] Biden, and above all, they don't want to talk about the Rigged 2020 Presidential Election, all topics discussed."

YouTube said it took down the video because it violated its misinformation policy, particularly Trump's claims about widespread voter fraud in the 2020 US presidential election.

The NELK Boys group said the video received more than five million views in 24 hours.

Although YouTube took down video of the interview, it is still available on Spotify and Apple services.

During the interview, Trump took jabs at the Biden administration for the record high gas prices, raising inflation, the catastrophic Afghanistan withdrawal, record illegal immigration numbers on the US southern border and the Ukraine conflict.

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US Sees No Signs of Radiological Release in Ukraine - Energy Secretary

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Radiation monitors continue to operate normally in much of the territory of Ukraine and the United States has found no indications of any radiation release in the country, US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in a statement. "Thankfully, radiation monitors in much of Ukraine still function, and we have not detected any signs of radiological release," Granholm said in a Twitter statement on Friday. "[The Department of] Energy continues to monitor the situation." Granholm said the US remains concerned about Russia's "reckless actions and violations of nuclear safety principles." Earlier in the day, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said statements from Kiev claiming there was a safety threat from radiation posed by the Chernobyl nuclear power plant after it was taken under control by Russian troops were not true.

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US Navy Reserve Officer Faces Bribery, Afghan Visa Fraud Charges - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - A US Navy Reserves commander now living in Italy faces charges of bribery and visa fraud over a bribery scheme to get special United States visas for Afghan nationals, the State Department announced. "A Florida man who serves as a commander in the US Navy Reserves appeared today on criminal charges related to an alleged bribery scheme involving special visas for Afghan nationals," the State Department said in a press release on Friday. According to court documents, Jeromy Pittmann, 53, of Pensacola, Florida, currently residing in Naples, Italy, was paid to draft, submit or falsely verify false letters of recommendation for citizens of Afghanistan who applied to the State Department for Special Immigrant Visas, the release said. "Pittmann is alleged to have signed over 20 false letters in which he represented, among other things, that he had supervised the applicants while they worked as translators in support of the US Army and NATO; that the applicants' lives were in jeopardy because the Taliban considered them to be traitors ... Pittmann is alleged to have received thousands of dollars in bribes," the release added.

Pittmann made his initial appearance today. He is charged with accepting bribes and conspiring to commit visa fraud. If convicted of both counts, he faces up to 20 years in prison, according to the release.

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**Chevron Phillips Agrees to Pay \$3.4M In Penalty, Cut Pollution at US Plants - Justice Dept.**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Chevron Phillips Chemical Company has agreed to pay a \$3.4 million civil penalty and to reduce harmful air pollution at three petrochemical plants it operates in the United States, the US Justice Department announced in a press release.

"Chevron Phillips Chemical Company has agreed to make upgrades and perform compliance measures estimated to cost \$118 million to resolve allegations that it violated the Clean Air Act and state air pollution control laws at three petrochemical manufacturing facilities located in Cedar Bayou, Port Arthur, and Sweeney, Texas," the The Justice Department said in a press release on Friday.

The Justice Department said Chevron Phillips will also pay a \$3.4 million civil penalty and the settlement will eliminate thousands of tons of air pollution from flares.

"According to the complaint filed with a consent decree, the company failed to properly operate and monitor its industrial flares, which resulted in excess emissions of harmful air pollution at the three Texas facilities. The company regularly 'oversteamed' the flares and failed to comply with other key operating constraints," the release said.

Consequently, Chevron Phillips failed to ensure the volatile organic compounds hazardous air pollutants contained in the gases routed to the flares were efficiently combusted, the release added.

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**Blink, AU Chief Sign Deal to Boost Covid, Public Health Cooperation - State Department**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and the African Union (AU) Commission have signed a new Memorandum of Cooperation to boost their partnership on public health issues, including their response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Department of State said in a press release.

"US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and African Union Commission (AUC) Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat signaled a shared commitment to elevate and expand a public health partnership by signing today a Memorandum of Cooperation at the US-AUC High Level Dialogue in Washington," the release said on Friday.

The memorandum strengthens and establishes national public health institutes, enhances public health research in Africa, expands public health workforce development, enables private

sector engagement, and builds capacity in manufacturing vaccines and other health security commodities, the State Department said.

"All of these areas are instrumental in the global COVID-19 response. They support the African Union's call for [a] New Public Health Order for Africa, and global health security beyond the COVID-19 pandemic," the release said.

Africa CDC has been a global and regional leader during the COVID-19 pandemic and the partnership between the United States and Africa CDC has grown significantly since the organization's initial development in 2015, the release noted.

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**Cuban National Gets 3 Years for \$5M In Gas Pump Credit Card Scam - US Justice Dept.**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge sentenced a Cuban national to more than three years in jail for his role in a \$5 million credit card scam carried out at gasoline stations, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"A Cuban man was sentenced today to 37 months in prison for conspiracy to commit bank fraud," the release said on Friday. "According to court documents, Denis Monsibaez Diaz, 38, and other co-conspirators, all of whom are Cuban nationals, placed skimming devices on gas pumps ...capable of recording the credit and debit bank card numbers, along with the PINs, of the customers that used their cards at the gas pumps."

Diaz is the seventh defendant sentenced for the conspiracy and the gang in which he participated was attributed with aggregate losses of over \$5 million over several years, the Justice Department said.

"The leader of the crew, Yasmani Granja Quijada, 33, was found to be trading over 9,800 additional stolen credit card numbers using his email account over the past few years. On January 4, 2021, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in the conspiracy," the release noted.

The FBI and US Marshals Service seized numerous vehicles and other items that were purchased by the defendants with funds stolen through credit cards, including a boat and luxury vehicles. Several other conspirators remain at large, the Justice Department noted.

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**Number of Extremist, Hate Groups in US Declines 3rd Year in Row - Report**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The number of extremist and hate groups in the United States declined in 2021 for a third year in a row to 733, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) said in its annual report.

"After reaching a historic high of 1,020 [hate groups] in 2018, hate group numbers have fallen for the third year in a row, to 733 in 2021," the SPLC annual report said on Friday. "The number of anti-government groups, too, has fallen from 566 in 2020 to 488 in 2021."

The SPLC cautioned that the decline in the number of such groups does not suggest the ideas that mobilize them have declined as they now operate more openly in the political mainstream. Consequently, Americans must remain vigilant about the problem at hand.

The United States needs to address the threat of extremism as a social problem, which means it has to commit to make significant investments in social programs and public health-inspired prevention measures, the report said.

With sound and comprehensive public policies, meaningful investment from business and government, as well as grassroots community organizing, the tide can be turned, the report added.

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US Activists to Hold Protest Outside NATO Command in Virginia Over Bloc's Role in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - American activists will hold a rally outside NATO Command in the US city of Norfolk this weekend to oppose the bloc's expansion, its role in the Ukraine Conflict as well as a possible war with Russia, The Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality said in a press release.

"The Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace and Planet and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality will sponsor a demonstration from 1-2 p.m. Sunday, March 13, one block from NATO Command at Naval Station Norfolk to protest the responsibility of the US government and NATO in the current war in Ukraine," the release said.

The activists group pointed out in its release that the "aggressive expansion of NATO to Russia's borders" was a central issue that provoked the current conflict.

"It is vital for those who oppose war to speak out in protest over NATO expansion and any involvement of NATO in Russia's war with Ukraine," the release said. "No to war with Russia! No to sanctions! No to NATO! Stop the wars at home and abroad!"

Earlier on Friday, Biden said the United States would defend the territory of the NATO member states against an attack from Russia but such action could lead to World War III.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

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US Authorizes Activities Related to Humanitarian Projects in LPR, DPR – Treasury

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced that it has issued a license authorizing certain transactions with non-governmental organizations in the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) related to humanitarian projects.

"Today, OFAC issued Ukraine-related General License 23, to authorize certain transactions that are ordinarily incident and necessary to nongovernmental organizations' activities in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic or Luhansk People's Republic regions of Ukraine, including activities related to humanitarian projects to meet basic human needs, democracy building, education, non-commercial developments projects, and environmental and natural resource protection," the Treasury Department said on Friday.

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US Sanctions Russians for Alleged Support of N. Korea Weapons Programs - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is sanctioning two individuals and three entities tied to Russia for their alleged support of North Korean weapons program development, the Treasury Department said in a press release.

"The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) today sanctioned two individuals and three entities for supporting the DPRK's ongoing development of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs in violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs)," the Treasury Department said on Friday.

The actions targeted a network of Russia-based individuals and entities complicit in helping North Korea procure components for its ballistic missile systems, the release said. The US on Friday also sanctioned dozens of other Russian individuals and entities for their support of the Kremlin's ongoing military operations in Ukraine.

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US Treasury Adds 10 Members of VTB Bank's Management Board to Russia Sanctions List

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed anti-Russia sanctions against ten members of VTB bank's management board, the US Department of Treasury said.

"Today, OFAC [Office of Foreign Assets Control] is designating the ten individuals comprising VTB Bank's management board: Olga Konstantinovna Dergunova, Vadim Valerievich Kulik, Valerii Vasilyevich Lukyanenko, Anatolii Yuryevich Pechatnikov, Natalia Germanovna Dirks, Maxim Dmitrievich Kondratenko, Erkin Rakhmatovich Norov, Svyatoslav Evgenievich Ostrovsky,

Dmitrii Vasilyevich Pyanov, Yuriy Nikolaevich Andresov," the Treasury said in a press release on Friday.

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US Adds Dozens of Russian Individuals, Entities to Sanctions List - Treasury Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing sanctions against dozens more individuals and entities tied to the Kremlin for their support of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and the North Korean weapons programs, the US Treasury Department said.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued a new round of sanctions targeting Russian and Kremlin elites, oligarchs, and Russia's political and national security leaders who have supported Russian President Vladimir Putin's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine," the Treasury Department said in a press release on Friday.

OFAC also sanctioned two individuals and three entities for supporting North Korea's development of its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, the release said.

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Blinken, Ukraine Counterpart in Call Discuss US, G7 Actions Against Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba discussed the latest actions against Russia in light of its military operation in Ukraine, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to discuss the foreign minister's trilateral meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. Secretary Blinken updated Foreign Minister Kuleba on the joint actions the United States is taking today in coordination with the G7 and the EU to further raise the costs on Russia," Price said on Friday.

The two diplomats expressed their concerns over the alleged Russian disinformation campaign, including at the United Nations, the statement said.

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Ban on Russian Alcohol to Make Americans Pay More for Inferior Alternatives - Distributors

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's ban on alcohol beverage imports from Russia will not significantly affect businesses in the United States, but consumers will have to pay for expensive and lower-quality alternatives, restaurant owners and distributors of Russian-made alcoholic beverages told Sputnik.

On Friday, President Joe Biden said the US is banning imports of alcohol, seafood and diamonds from Russia in the latest batch of sanctions for its special military operation in Ukraine.

"The ban on the sale of Russian-made vodka in the United States will in no way affect the 'Russian' or American businesses [stores and restaurants]. Customers will simply buy another brand of vodka," an owner of a Russian restaurant in the United States told Sputnik. "In this situation, American consumers will lose because Russian vodka has a really good taste and quality and, in most cases, cheaper than American and European ones."

While Biden was making an announcement about a new ban on Russian products, one of the biggest alcohol distributors in Washington, D.C. informed Sputnik that there is a cargo ship with Russian vodka on its way to the United States and it remains unclear whether it will be allowed to unload in any of the ports.

What can affect the alcohol market in the United States is the stoppage of supplies from Ukraine, according to founder of major alcohol importer Interbalt Fine Wine & Spirits, Konstantin Khizder.

Khizder believes the ban on Russian imports will not have any significant impact on the market in the United States but predicts a major gap in imports from Ukraine amid the ongoing military conflict there.

"Yes, until the war ends in Ukraine and Ukraine returns to a normal way of life. You know, the roads are bombed there. We have a plant in Odessa, we have a plant in Kharkiv, we have a plant in the Chernihiv region. This is a catastrophe," Khizder told Sputnik when asked whether the situation in Ukraine will impact deliveries of Ukrainian alcohol to the United States.

Khizder added that his company did not suffer any losses as a result of the boycott of Russian-made alcohol. Moreover, even after the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine, Interbalt proceeded with minor quantity deliveries of Russian beer and vodka to customers.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces said the Ukrainian troops were using typical terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- \* US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday if reports that Syrian volunteers could join hostilities in Ukraine are true, it would lead to a greater escalation of the conflict.
- \* The United States continues sending security systems to Ukraine amid its conflict with Russia and another shipment will be on the way to Europe in the next 24 hours, a senior US Defense Department official said.
- \* The United Nations is urging Russia and Ukraine to intensify peace negotiations to resolve the conflict between them, Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said.
- \* Ukraine in cooperation with Western partners is developing a mechanism to confiscate frozen foreign exchange reserves of the Russian Central Bank to use them for the country's recovery, Ukrainian First Deputy Economy Minister Denys Kudin said.

#### SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

- \* The United States sanctioned the wife and adult children of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, the State Department said on Friday.
- \* The European Union, the G7 countries and other partners will soon cancel the most-favored-nation status for Russia in the World Trade Organization by removing key trade advantages, European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said.
- \* The European Union will ban imports of key products of Russia's steel sector in its new round of sanctions, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement.
- \* US President Joe Biden banned the supply, sale or export of US dollar-denominated banknotes to Russia.
- \* Biden signed an executive order (E.O.) that will create legal authority to bar any future investment in any sector of the Russian economy, the White House said.
- \* Biden said his administration is banning imports of vodka, seafood and diamonds from Russia in response to the latter's military operation in Ukraine.

#### IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

- \* Success in Iran nuclear negotiations and a return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will require decisions and seriousness from Tehran and Moscow, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.
- \* Negotiations on the JCPOA held in Vienna are suspended to resolve remaining issues, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

#### BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS IN UKRAINE

- \* The United Nations has no mandate to conduct investigations into biological programs in Ukraine, but will monitor the situation "very closely," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday in response to the request by Russia's parliament.
- \* The United States refuses international inspection at US-linked biological laboratories around the world which means it may have something to hide, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.
- \* Nebenzia warned European countries about the threat of a biological agent outbreak in the region from biological laboratories in Ukraine with links to the United States.
- \* The United Nations does not know about any biological weapons programs that are allegedly being run in Ukraine, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, said.

#### META'S POLICY ON RUSSIA

- \* The United Nation stands against any form of hate speech, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday in reference to the decision by the company Meta to temporarily allow calls for violence against Russians on its social media platforms.
- \* Meta global affairs president Nick Clegg said that the company is going to apply its policy allowing calls for violence against Russians only in Ukraine itself.
- \* Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor announced on Friday restricting access to Instagram as a response to the platform facilitating the spread of calls for violence against Russians.
- \* Meta's decision to allow violent speech against Russians is a matter of concern and the issue will be discussed with the company, Elizabeth Trossell, spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said.

#### BIDEN-ZELENSKY TALKS

- \* Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday that he had spoken with US President Joe Biden, informing him about the current situation in Ukraine.
- \* Biden and Zelenskyy discussed new Western sanctions against Russia and growing security and economic aid to Ukraine in a phone call on Friday, the White House said.

#### ENERGY MARKETS

- \* Italian oil giant Eni announced on Friday its plans to stop making new oil supply contracts with Russia and replace Russian oil through the international market.
- \* The European Commission (EC) will present by the end of March options on how to limit the impact of rising gas prices on the cost of electricity in the European Union, EC President, Ursula von der Leyen, said at a press conference.
- \* The European Commission will present a plan by mid-May on how to phase out the EU's dependence on Russian gas, oil and coal by 2027, Von der Leyen said.
- \* Canada is banning imports of oil products from Russia, the Canadian government announced.

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#### Biden Says Would Fight WWII for NATO But Not Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States would defend NATO territory from any Russian advance but such a response would lead to World War III, President Joe Biden said on Friday, while ruling out fighting such a war over Ukraine.

"We're gonna continue to stand together with our allies in Europe and send unmistakable message that we will defend every inch of NATO territory, every single inch with the united galvanized NATO," Biden said during remarks to the House Democratic Caucus. "That's why I moved over 12,000 American forces along the borders with Russia: Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, etc., because if they [Russia] move once, granted if we respond, it is World War III,

but we have a sacred obligation on NATO territory, a sacred obligation Article Five, although we will not fight a third world war in Ukraine."

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces said the Ukrainian troops were using typical terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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#### Vandalism Against Russian Churches in Europe Only Isolated Incidents - Metropolitan

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Most Europeans have begun to understand that the crisis in Ukraine was not created by the Russian people nor by the Russian Orthodox Church and they are not aggressors as portrayed by Western media, Metropolitan of Berlin and Germany Mark told Sputnik.

"I would say people are beginning to see the difference and not consider our church or all Russians as aggressors," Metropolitan Mark said.

At the same time, some Russian churches in Europe, North America and elsewhere have experienced acts of vandalism in recent days because of the events in Ukraine, the Metropolitan said.

"However, I have to say these are only isolated incidents," he added.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine in response to the request by the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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#### State Department Says Syrian Fighters in Ukraine Would Escalate Conflict

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesman Ned Price said that if reports that Syrian foreign fighters could join hostilities in Ukraine are true, it would lead to a greater escalation in the conflict.

"We've seen these reports, we've seen Putin's comments about Syrian foreign fighters, if true, this would represent an even further escalation," Price said during a press briefing.

On Friday, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu reported to President Vladimir Putin that many volunteers are ready to help Donbas military, including 16,000 people from Middle Eastern countries.

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Sullivan, UK Foreign Secretary Discuss Anti-Russia Sanctions, Aid to Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan discussed with UK Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss over the telephone the coordination on sanctions imposed against Russia and the provision of aid for Ukraine, the White House said in a readout on Friday.

"National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met today with Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss of the United Kingdom. They discussed Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war in Ukraine. They also reviewed the ongoing coordination with Allies and partners to impose severe costs on Moscow for its aggression and to provide security, economic, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine," the White House said.

Sullivan and Truss also discussed a range of shared priorities in Asia and in the Middle East, and welcomed the launch earlier this week of a new US-UK dialogue on the Indo-Pacific, the White House added.

The United States, United Kingdom and their allies here have imposed comprehensive sanctions and other economic restrictions against Russian entities and individuals in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

Russia has said the operation is intended to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and is undertaking operations solely against Ukrainian military targets. Russia has also said it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

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Russian Church in Germany Helps Stuck Truckers, Refugees From Ukraine - Metropolitan

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Clergy and faithful of the Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR) in Germany provide food, medicine and other support to refugees from Ukraine and Russian truckers stuck in the country due to the recent sanctions, Metropolitan of Berlin and Germany Mark told Sputnik.

"About 1,000 Russian truckers are being stuck now in Germany. These people were on the way when the current crisis in Ukraine began, so they do not know how to leave Germany now. They have no money, their phones are blocked," Metropolitan Mark said.

Many Russian believers and Germans are driving now on highways trying to find those truckers and provide them some help, he added. He also did not rule out that some of these truckers remain unaccounted because they could be stuck in very different places.

Metropolitan pointed out that the church began supporting refugees who are coming to Germany from Ukraine.

"Three ROCOR bishops and one Moscow Patriarchate bishop in Europe issued a proclamation asking clergy and flock to help. Someone can provide people housing, others may give them food, medicines or different support," he added.

As most of the refugees do not speak German and even English, young Russian parishioners are visiting local hospitals and helping them to communicate with physicians, which is sometimes needed urgently, Arndt noted.

"We have many areas where our people can help," he emphasized. "Unfortunately I have no specific information, because it changes even not every day, but each minute."

Speaking of refugees who flee from Ukraine to Russia, Metropolitan Mark noted that they receive support mostly from ROCOR's parishes in America.

"I heard that they receive assistance more from America rather than from Europe," he said. European dioceses also send humanitarian aid to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the leadership of Metropolitan Onufrii.

"We provide them food, clothes, blankets and other things," metropolitan Mark said.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk for protection against attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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#### **Biden Vetoed Delivery of Polish MiG-29 Jets to Ukraine to Avoid Causing Wider War- Reports**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden vetoed Poland's proposal to send Polish MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine in order to avoid provoking Russia to get directly confronted with NATO, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

The report said, citing the White House, that the US decision to deny Polish MiG-29 jets to Ukraine came directly from Biden.

The United States has provided Ukraine with other security assistance such as anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, the report said.

Earlier on Friday, Biden said the United States would defend the territory of the NATO member states against an attack from Russia but such action could lead to World War III.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Two weeks into the operation, Russia's military said the Ukrainian troops have been using terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and positioning weaponry in civilian quarters.

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Iran Nuclear Deal Will Take Decisions From Moscow, Tehran - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Success in Iran nuclear negotiations and a return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will require decisions and seriousness from Tehran and Moscow, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.

"There will need to be decisions made in places like Tehran and Moscow, and if that political will is there, if that seriousness of purpose is there, we remain confident that we can achieve a mutual return to compliance in fairly short order," Price said during a press briefing.

US sanctions on Russia over their ongoing military operation in Ukraine are separate from the JCPOA and should not have any impact on negotiations, Price added.

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US Sanctions Wife, Children of Kremlin Spokesman - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States sanctioned the wife and adult children of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, the State Department said on Friday.

"We are also designating 12 members of the Russian Duma, who led the effort to recognize the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as well as the wife and adult children of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov," spokesman Ned Price told a press briefing.

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US Checking Deconfliction Line With Russia Once or Twice Per Day - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has been checking the deconfliction line with Russia once or twice a day so the Russians know how to use the system, US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

"To my knowledge, it's been us using it to check in once or twice a day... just so that we know they know how to use the system," Kirby said during a press conference.

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UN Has No Mandate to Investigate Biological Programs in Ukraine - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The United Nations has no mandate to conduct investigations into biological programs in Ukraine, but will monitor the situation "very closely,"

spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday in response to the relevant request from the Russian parliament.

"We will continue to report on biological weapons. The UN does not have a mandate to do an investigation, unless it is given a mandate, but we will obviously monitor the situation very closely," Dujarric told reporters.

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**Austin to Meet With Military, Civilian Leaders in Slovakia Next Week – Pentagon**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will travel to Slovakia next week to meet with senior military and civilian leaders and reiterate US commitment to NATO's eastern flank, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

"He [Lloyd Austin] will follow up his visit to Brussels [next week] for the [NATO] defense ministerial with a visit to Slovakia where he will meet with senior civilian and military leaders to again make clear our firm commitment to NATO's eastern flank and talk about ways to deepen the US-Slovakia relationship," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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**UN Says Stands Against Hate Speech After Meta Allowed Calls for Violence Against Russians**

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nation stands against any form of hate speech, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday in reference to the decision by the company Meta to temporarily allow calls for violence against Russians on its social media platforms.

"Our human rights colleagues expressed their concern. We stand clearly against all hate speech, all calls for violence. That kind of language is just unacceptable," Dujarric told reporters when asked about the United Nations' comments on Meta's decision to allow calls for violence against Russians.

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**US Says Checking Deconfliction Line With Russia 'Once or Twice a Day,' No Interactions Yet**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has been checking the deconfliction line with Russia once or twice a day amid the Ukraine crisis, but there have been no specific interactions so far, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Friday.

"On the deconfliction line, ... no specific interactions to speak to," Kirby said. "But we do test it once or twice a day, and that continues. This far, with maybe only a couple of exceptions, the Russians picked up on the other end ... So, we know it's functional."

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**Pentagon Says Has No Expectation Austin-Shoigu Call Will Happen Anytime Soon**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday that there have been no phone talks between Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, and he did not expect such a call to take place in the near future.

"I have no conversations between Secretary Austin and minister Shoigu to speak to and I have no expectation that that's going to change anytime soon," Kirby said.

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**Meta Says Rules Allowing Calls for Violence Against Russians to Be Applied in Ukraine Only**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Meta global affairs president Nick Clegg said on Friday that the company is going to apply its policy allowing calls for violence against Russians only in Ukraine itself.

"I want to be crystal clear: our policies are focused on protecting people's rights to speech as an expression of self defence in reaction to a military invasion of their country. The fact is, if we applied our standard content policies without any adjustments we would now be removing content from ordinary Ukrainians expressing their resistance and fury at the invading military forces, which would rightly be viewed as unacceptable," he said in a statement released on Twitter.

According to Clegg, the company "does not tolerate Russophobia or any kind of discrimination, harassment or violence towards Russians".

"To be clear, we are only going to apply this policy in Ukraine itself. We have no quarrel with the Russian people. There is no change at all in our policies on hate speech as far as the Russian people are concerned," he said.

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**YouTube Says Blocking Russian State-Funded Media Channels Effective Immediately**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - YouTube announced on Friday that it is blocking Russian state-funded media channels worldwide effective immediately.

"In line with that, we are also now blocking access to YouTube channels associated with Russian state-funded media globally, expanding from across Europe. This change is effective immediately, and we expect our systems to take time to ramp up," the statement said.

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US Refuses International Inspection of Its Biolabs, Has Something to Hide - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States refuses international inspection at US-linked biological laboratories around the world which means it may have something to hide, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"Placing it [United States] under international verification is something they are categorically refusing to do," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting. "They blocked since 2001 a legally binding protocol under the Biological Weapons Convention about creating an effective verification mechanism to ensure compliance. And this can lead us to the thought that the United States has something to hide."

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US Sentences Ex-Detective to 75 Months for Bribery, Drug Distribution - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Christopher Collare, former Carlisle Police Department detective in the US state of Pennsylvania, has been sentenced to six years and four months in prison for bribery, drug distribution and making false statements, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"A former veteran detective for the Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Police Department, who was a task force officer with the FBI and a member of the Cumberland County Drug Task Force, was sentenced today to 75 months in prison for bribery, drug distribution and making false statements," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Collare, 54, used his official position to obtain sex from two women in exchange for agreeing to take actions in prosecutions, the release said.

"Specifically, in 2015, Collare agreed to accept sex or money in exchange for not appearing at an evidentiary hearing so that a criminal charge would be dismissed. In 2018, Collare agreed to accept sexual favors in exchange for taking steps to help reduce a potential sentence," the release said.

Collare, who was also a member of the Cumberland County Drug Task Force, was found guilty of distributing heroin in 2016, the release added.

Collare was also convicted of lying in November 2015 on a federal form he completed as he sought to become an FBI task force officer, and of making several false statements when federal agents interviewed him in May 2018, according to the release.

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US Continues to Flow Security Systems to Ukraine, Another Shipment on the Way – Official

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The United States continues sending security systems to Ukraine amid its conflict with Russia and another shipment will be on the way to Europe in the next 24 hours, a senior US defense official said on Friday.

"We continue to flow security systems to Ukraine. There is another shipment on the way in the next 24 hours into Europe. So, it's happening even as we speak. We're going to continue to flow resources to Ukraine as fast and as much as we can," the official said during a press briefing.

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Nebenzia Warns Europe About Threat of Spread of Biological Agents From Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia on Friday warned European countries about the threat of a biological agent outbreak in the region from biological laboratories in Ukraine with links to the United States.

"Right next to the European Union, you've had an experimental platform for extremely dangerous biological trials," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting. "And we call upon you to think about a very real biological danger to the people in European countries, which can result from an uncontrolled spread of bio agents from Ukraine, which as we have seen with COVID-19 is impossible to stop, and if there is such a scenario, then all Europe will be covered by it."

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Biden, Zelenskyy Discuss New Russia Sanctions, Surging Assistance to Kiev - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - President Joseph Biden and Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed new Western sanctions against Russia and growing security and economic aid to Ukraine in a phone call on Friday, the White House said.

"President Biden highlighted how the United States is continuing to surge security, humanitarian, and economic assistance to Ukraine," the readout said. "He also updated

President Zelenskyy on the actions the United States is taking today in coordination with the G7 and the EU to further raise the costs on Russia."

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Biden Bans Supply, Export, Sale of US Dollar-Denominated Banknotes to Russia - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden banned on Friday the supply, sale or export of US dollar-denominated banknotes to Russia.

"The exportation, reexportation, sale, or supply, directly or indirectly, from the United States, or by a United States person, wherever located, of U.S. dollar-denominated banknotes to the Government of the Russian Federation or any person located in the Russian Federation; and (v) any approval, financing, facilitation, or guarantee by a United States person, wherever located, of a transaction by a foreign person where the transaction by that foreign person would be prohibited by this section if performed by a United States person or within the United States," Biden's executive order said.

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US Sees No Indication Belarusian Troops Have Entered Ukraine - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States sees no signs that Belarusian troops have entered Ukraine, a senior defense official said on Friday.

"No indication that Belarusian troops have entered Ukraine," the official said.

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UN Unaware of Any Biological Weapons Programs in Ukraine - Under Secretary General

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations does not know about any biological weapons programs that are allegedly being run in Ukraine, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, said on Friday.

"I am aware of media reports regarding allegations of biological weapons programs, the United Nations is not aware of any biological weapons programs," she told a UN Security Council.

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#### UN Calls on Russia, Ukraine to Intensify Peace Talks - Under Secretary General

UNITED NATIONS, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is urging Russia and Ukraine to intensify peace negotiations to resolve the conflict between them, Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said on Friday.

"The need for negotiations to stop the war in Ukraine could not be more urgent. We note the three round of talks held thus far between Ukrainian and Russian delegations. We call for such efforts to intensify," DiCarlo told a UN Security Council meeting.

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#### US House Will Vote Next Week to Revoke Normal Trade Relations With Russia - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will vote next week on revoking permanent normal trade relations with Russia in retaliation for its military operation in Ukraine, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, President Biden announced that the United States alongside its G7 and EU allies will strip Russia of its most favored nation status.

"When the House returns next week, we will take up legislation to formalize this revocation, and it is our hope that it will receive a strong, bipartisan vote," Pelosi said in a statement.

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#### US to Ensure Ukraine Has Weapons to Defend Against Russian Forces - Biden

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will make sure that Ukraine has the necessary weapons to fight and defend against Russian forces, US President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"We will make sure Ukraine has weapons to defend against invading Russian forces. We will send money and food and aid to save the Ukrainian people. And I will welcome Ukrainian refugees. We should welcome them here with open arms if they need access," Biden said in his remarks about new US measures against Russia. "We are going to provide more support for Ukraine."

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#### US to Establish Legal Authority to Ban Investment in Any Russian Economic Sector - WH

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden signed an executive order (E.O.) that will create legal authority to bar any future investment in any sector of the Russian economy, the White House said in a fact sheet on Friday.

"This E.O. will establish the legal authority for future investment restrictions in any sector of the Russian economy, as may be determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, by a United States person," the release said.

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US, G7, EU to Strip Russia of Favored Trade Status - Biden

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The United States along with its European allies is working to deny most favored nation status to Russia which will mean higher tariffs and more barriers in trade relations with Moscow, President Joe Biden said on Friday.

"[E]ach of our nation is going to take steps to deny most favored nation status to Russia, and most favored nation status designation means two countries have agreed to trade with each other under the best possible terms, low tariffs, few barriers, trade, and the highest possible imports allowed in the United States," Biden said in his remarks about new sanctions against Russia.

Revoking of the permanent normal trade relations status will make it harder for Russia to do business with the United States, and doing so jointly with European allies will be another crushing blow to the Russian economy, he added.

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US to Ban Export of Luxury Goods to Russia - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will end the export of luxury goods to individuals in Russia in response to the country's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Friday.

"President Biden will sign an Executive Order (E.O) that will end the exportation of luxury items to any person located in the Russian Federation. This will ensure that U.S. persons are not providing luxury items, such as high end-watches, luxury vehicles, high-end apparel, high-end alcohol, jewelry, and other goods frequently purchased by Russian elites," the White House said in a fact sheet.

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#### US to Introduce Sanctions on Russian Officials, Bank Executives - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will introduce additional sanctions on Russian government officials and bank executives for their connection to the ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Friday in a fact sheet.

"Today's announcements include ... Full blocking Sanctions on Additional Russian Elites and their Family Members. This includes Yuri Kovalchuk, executives of banks we have sanctioned, and Duma [lower house] members who sponsored legislation to recognize the so-called 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic.' This action will follow up on multiple efforts, along with those of our allies and partners, to target Russian elites and their family members who are profiting from this war of choice, and cuts them off from the U.S. financial system, freezes any assets they hold in the United States and blocks their travel to the United States," the fact sheet said.

The G7 will also add new names of Russian oligarchs and their families to be targeted by sanctions, President Joe Biden said on Friday during remarks on the new sanctions against Moscow.

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#### Biden Says US to Ban Imports of Vodka, Seafood From Russia

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Friday his administration is going to ban imports of vodka, seafood and diamonds from Russia in response to the latter's military operation in Ukraine.

"We are also taking the first step preventing imports of goods from several signature sectors of the Russian economy including seafood, vodka, and diamonds," Biden said in his remarks about new sanctions against Russia.

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#### US, G7 Will Ensure Russia Cannot Obtain IMF, World Bank Financing - White House

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States alongside G7 partners will ensure Russia cannot obtain financing from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or World Bank in retaliation for their ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Friday.

"The G7 Leaders will agree to ensure Russia cannot obtain financing from the leading multilateral financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Russia cannot grossly violate international law and expect to benefit from being part of the international economic order," the White House said in a fact sheet.

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Harris, Romanian President Discuss Increasing US Military Presence in Country  
WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said Friday that he had discussed with US Vice President Kamala Harris the need to increase the American military presence in the country in light of the Ukraine conflict.

"We have also discussed the need within this tense context to keep increasing the American and Allied presence in Romania in the long run as an additional measure to ensure the security of our country and of the entire region," Iohannis said during a joint press conference in Bucharest.

Iohannis added that Romania is going to continue its cooperation with the United States in the domain of civilian nuclear energy to become independent of Russian energy supplies.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only.

Prior to the Russian military operation in Ukraine, NATO deployed an additional 1,000 troops to a major air base in Romania as part of the bloc's effort to bolster its military presence in Eastern Europe amid Ukraine tensions.

Harris is on a visit to Eastern Europe to participate in high-level talks about NATO posture adjustments and other steps being coordinated with allies in response to Russia's operation in Ukraine. Harris announced on Thursday that the United States had delivered Patriot missiles to Poland.

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US, EU Coordinate Sanctions Against Russia, Ready to Do More - Romanian President

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The European Union and the United States have coordinated their sanctions packages against Russia, and stand ready to continue imposing more restrictions if necessary, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said on Friday.

"The sanctions packages have been discussed between the United States and the European Union," Iohannis said at a joint press conference with Vice President Kamala Harris in Bucharest. "We worked very well together on this and we will continue to work together on this. This is the economic side. On the other hand, the two of us just stated that we stand strong together in line with the Article 5 of the NATO Treaty and we will continue this way. So, if new sanctions will be necessary, they will be discussed and applied."

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**Moody's Downgrades Eurasian Development Bank Rating to B3 – Statement**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - Moody's decided to downgrade its rating of the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) from Baa1 to B3, the company said in a statement on Friday. "Moody's Investors Service downgraded the long-term ratings, including the issuer rating, the foreign currency senior unsecured debt and the foreign currency senior unsecured medium-term note program rating, of the EDB to B3/(P)B3 from Baa1/(P)Baa1. Concurrently Moody's downgraded the short-term issuer rating to Not-Prime from P-2," the statement read.

The long-term ratings remain on review for further downgrade, it added.

The decision to downgrade EDB's ratings to B3 related to sharply rising risks to the bank's liquidity and funding, member support, and capital adequacy as a result of Russia's actions in Ukraine and the international response, the agency said.

"The downgrade reflects a stark worsening in EDB's operating environment following the increased severity of sanctions on Russian and Belarusian entities. With Russia the largest and Belarus (Ca Negative) the third largest shareholders in EDB, and significant asset exposure to borrowers in the two countries, the bank faces heightened uncertainty about the application and scope of sanctions," the statement said.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk for protection against attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Western countries imposed sanctions against Moscow.

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**US to Ban imports of Russian Alcohol, Seafood – Reports**

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is planning to ban imports of alcohol and seafood from Russia as part of fresh sanctions for its special military operation in Ukraine, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing people in the know.

US President Joe Biden will reportedly provide more details about the move during his speech later in the day in which he is expected to revoke normal trade relations with Russia.

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### Harris Sees No Signs of Putin Engaging in 'Serious' Diplomacy on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) - The United States sees no indication of Russian President Vladimir Putin engaging in "serious" diplomacy with regard to the Ukraine crisis, Vice President Kamala Harris said on Friday.

"From the beginning, the United States has been attempting sincerely to engage in diplomacy, actively," Harris said at a press conference with the Romanian president. "And from everything that we know and have witnessed, Putin shows no sign of engaging in serious diplomacy."

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### Sherman Discusses DPRK, Russia With Japanese, South Korean Counterparts

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Sputnik) – US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed North Korea and Russia in a call with her Japanese and South Korean counterparts on Friday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"Sherman spoke with Republic of Korea (ROK) First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong Kun and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo today to discuss shared concerns about the DPRK's WMD and ballistic missile programs. They also discussed the importance of unified action to hold Russia accountable for Putin's decision to invade Ukraine," Price said.

Sherman strongly condemned the DPRK's recent ballistic missile launches, and underscored the "ironclad" US commitment to the defense of its allies in South Korea and Japan, he added. The participants also discussed international efforts to "hold Russia accountable" for its operation in Ukraine, according to the statement.

On February 24, Russia began a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help in defending themselves from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. In response, Western nations have imposed comprehensive sanctions on Moscow.